



## **FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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## **SUPERVISOR RIDLEY-THOMAS AND CHILDREN'S DEFENSE FUND'S MARIAN WRIGHT EDELMAN ANNOUNCE PROSPOSAL TO DIVERT PROBATION YOUTHS FROM GANGS, CRIME**

**Los Angeles** -- Vowing to break America's pipeline to prison for minority teens, Los Angeles County Supervisor Mark Ridley-Thomas and Children's Defense Fund President Marian Wright Edelman on Thursday announced a comprehensive proposal to prevent recidivism among Los Angeles County youths.

The analysis of "re-entry" in Los Angeles County – the process by which incarcerated youths leave custody and seek to establish themselves in society-- examines the failures of the current system and proposes 10 steps for improvement.

Los Angeles County's juvenile probation population is the largest in the nation, at 20,000. Nationwide one in three African American males born in 2001, and one out of six Latino males born that year are at risk of imprisonment, according to the Children's Defense Fund.

"Incarceration is becoming the new American apartheid. And we are the world's leading jailer. If we do not confront the cradle to prison pipeline, we're

going to lose the last 50 years of social and racial progress,” Edelman said. “Our nation is in less danger from a foreign threat than from the pervasive poverty and racial disparities and miseducation that are contributing to widespread illiteracy, neglect, and abuse. These great gaps leave children unprepared for productive work in a global economy. We must declare war on the largest gap between rich and poor in our nation’s history and on the growing pernicious childhood poverty that is robbing millions of children of hope for the future. It is far cheaper to educate than to incarcerate our children.”

Supervisor Ridley-Thomas, who commissioned the report, added, “we must move beyond the fatally flawed view that the futures of youths in custody are beyond repair. It is critical we invest in elevating the education and health of these teens. Making such a commitment may not keep all of them from a future behind bars; but failing to do so practically guarantees these young men –and increasingly women—will form a permanent inmate class.”

The 65-page report, “Juvenile Reentry in Los Angeles County: An Exploration of Strengths, Barriers and Policy Options,” was authored by Children’s Defense Fund Staffers Michelle Newell and Angelica Salazar.

Some key challenges highlighted by the study include:

- One in five youths on probation in the Los Angeles Unified School District is identified as a special education student, double rate of the overall district enrollment;
- Half of males in custody had received mental health treatment prior to incarceration;
- An estimated 50% of males in Los Angeles County custody are involved in gangs.

When these youths leave custody, many are unprepared to become productive students or workers, contributing to frequent re-offenses. The study found the reentry process suffers from:

- Faulty planning for the youth's release, resulting in failure to promptly enroll in school or receive necessary medications or mental health treatment;
- Shortage of adequate drug treatment, mental health care, school support and job training;
- Insufficient gang intervention programs.

Ten recommendations are presented to better coordinate pre-release planning among various County departments such as Probation and Mental Health, expanding gang intervention programs.

The report also found the Probation Dept. must better enforce existing policies, from recordkeeping to ensuring probation officers complete their assigned tasks. In some cases, existing pilot programs, such as a pre-release assessment program now in two camps, may be expanded to improve re-entry throughout the system.

"This study gives us a road map to reform. Our probation system in Los Angeles County has descended into a one-way street to prison for too many youths. It's time we make a U-turn to salvage the lives of these young men and women and save society the tremendous cost of supporting a prison-bound generation," Ridley-Thomas said.

### **Los Angeles County Probation Facts:**

Youths on probation: 20,000

Youths in custody: 2,000

Racial makeup of youths on probation:

Latino, 62%

African American, 25%

White, 9%

Asian American, Native American, Other, 4%

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